



Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth
Bureau of Fire Services

Fire Marshal Bulletin – 2

Fire and Tornado Drills

The lack of periodic fire drills in many of our schools, colleges, universities, school dormitories and other public buildings has become a matter of serious concern to the Bureau of Fire Services (BFS) and all other members of the fire service.

An individual's best protection during a fire is the ability to exit a burning building quickly. Therefore, it is of vital importance that an evacuation plan be in effect for all buildings, and that it be practiced during fire drills.

Included in an evacuation plan should be directions to meet at a predesignated point away from the building and clear of danger where everyone can be accounted for. The meeting point should be well clear of fire lanes and any other areas that may be traversed by the fire department and other emergency personnel.

The BFS recommends that school officials and other owner representatives of the above facilities work with their local fire officials in developing an evacuation plan and conducting fire drills. This will not only assure a swift evacuation, but will greatly assist the fire department with building familiarity and faster access.

Public Buildings:

Under the authority of Section 19 of the Michigan Fire Prevention Act, the BFS recommends that a minimum of six fire drills be held each year in public buildings, one every other month.

In some public buildings where the majority of the occupant load is of a changing character, it is not possible to conduct regular organized fire drills such as would be held in a school. In such cases, the fire drills should be limited to regular employees who can be thoroughly schooled in the proper procedure, and can be trained to direct other building occupants in case of fire.

Schools - Colleges - Universities - School Dormitories:

As the Michigan Fire Prevention Act applies to these facilities, it requires that eight fire drills and two tornado safety drills be conducted each school year and that all doors and exits be kept unlocked during school hours and when the buildings are open to the public.

The law also requires that a log of the fire drills be maintained and be available for inspection upon request. A suggested format for recording required fire drill information is printed on the attached sheet of this bulletin.

School officials assume total responsibility for the safety and well being of their students, and must insure that fire drills are conducted on a regular basis as required by state law. Section 19 of the Michigan Fire Prevention Act is printed in its entirety on the attached sheet of this bulletin.

Your local fire department stands ready to assist you in developing an evacuation plan and lend a hand with fire drills when requested. Remember, during a fire, a fast and orderly evacuation of the building is the best insurance against injury and death.

TORNADO DRILLS

Effective March 30, 1998 House Bill 5237 amended the Michigan Fire Prevention Code, Act 207, P.A. 1941, as amended, Section 19 to require Tornado Drills in Schools. The new requirement applies to all schools, including state supported schools, colleges, universities and school dormitories.

Act 207, Sec. 19 (1) requires that the chief administrative officer and the teachers of all schools, including state supported schools, colleges, and universities and the owner, or owner's representative of all school dormitories shall have a fire drill each month and keep a record of the drills.

Sec. 19 (2) now requires schools to conduct a minimum of 8 fire drills for each school year.

Sec. 19 (3) now requires a minimum of 2 tornado safety drills for each school year at the schools and facilities described in subsection (1). These drills are for the purpose of preventing hazards and injuries in the event of severe weather.

The Bureau of Fire Services has met with the Michigan Committee for Severe Weather Awareness (MCSWA) and other interested organizations and departments in an effort to develop additional direction for officials responsible for implementation of tornado drills within educational facilities. The following general tornado safety guidelines, developed in part by MCSWA, are offered in that spirit:

- School officials should work in conjunction with local emergency management coordinators to develop a tornado response plan which establishes tornado shelter areas and also plans for monitoring and evaluating tornado drills. Local emergency management coordinators are listed on the Internet at <http://mspemd.org>
- Each facility should have a plan dictating exactly what to do when a tornado alarm sounds. Time is of the essence, and you may have only seconds to act. All school personnel should be familiar with established tornado procedures and review them periodically.

- Every school room and hallway should have a tornado shelter route diagram posted in plain view. Schools that have basements should designate them as shelters. Schools without basements should designate interior hallways on the ground floor, away from exterior walls, as shelter areas. Gymnasiums, auditoriums and other rooms with large, free-span roofs should not be utilized as shelter areas.
- The school tornado alarm must be independently operable and emit a distinctly different sound than the school fire alarm. Never use the school fire alarm to sound a tornado warning. The tornado alarm should be equipped with a back up electrical source in the event of power failure. Student and staff response to a tornado alarm must be immediate.
- Safe, orderly movement to the shelter area is crucial. Students should walk, not run, to the designated area. Classroom doors should be closed after students are evacuated to the shelter area. Do not open windows in the classroom; time is better spent seeking shelter. The school tornado response plan should include procedures to assist students with disabilities in getting to the shelter area.
- The tornado response plan must also assign specific staff with responsibility to remove students from playgrounds or other outdoor areas during a tornado and direct them to the designated shelter area. The plan must also provide coaches and athletic directors with guidance in the event severe weather occurs during athletic events.
- Students in portable or temporary classrooms must be evacuated to designated shelter areas or predetermined safe exterior areas such as ditches, culverts or ravines. They must be instructed to get on their knees, with their hands placed over their heads.
- Students assembled in designated tornado shelter areas, should be instructed to get on their knees in a prone position, making sure their heads face interior walls, while placing their hands behind their heads.
- School buses should not be operated during a period of tornado warning. If a tornado warning is issued or severe threatening weather is observed at dismissal time students should be moved to designated tornado shelter areas in the school. The school tornado response plan should provide bus drivers with information identifying potential shelters along their routes. Drivers must be prepared to move students to the nearest shelter if a warning is issued or threatening weather is observed. In the event there is no immediate shelter, students should evacuate the bus to a ditch, culvert, ravine or low lying area and assume the protective position until the threat of severe weather has passed.
- The tornado weather service issues a tornado **watch** when the possibility of tornados exists, and issues a tornado **warning** when an actual tornado has been spotted or exists on radar. Educational facilities should have an NOAA Weather Radio with a warning alarm tone in order to receive severe weather information directly from the National Weather Service. Upon receiving notification of a tornado watch, the principal should alert staff members. During a tornado watch, specific teachers or other school staff members should be designated to monitor commercial radio or television for tornado warnings, even if the school has a NOAA Weather Radio tone-alert system.

- In order to remain proactive in tornado preparedness, school officials must conduct tornado shelter drills in accordance with Michigan law. All tornado drills must include: staff and student participation, an audible signal independent of the school fire alarm and movement to shelter areas as primary components.

**FIRE AND TORNADO DRILLS AS REQUIRED IN
THE FIRE PREVENTION ACT, ACT 207, P.A. 1941, AS AMENDED**

Sec. 19. The chief administrative officer and the teachers of all schools, including state supported schools, colleges, and universities and the owner or owner's representative, of all school dormitories shall have a fire drill each month and keep all doors and exits unlocked during school hours, and when the school is open to the public. Each teacher in a school, including a state supported school, college, or university and the owner or owner's representative of a dormitory shall comply with these requirements and keep a record of the drills. A minimum of eight drills is required each school year. If weather conditions will not permit fire drills to be held at least once a month, then at least five fire drills shall be held in the fall of each year and three fire drills shall be held during the remaining part of the school year. A minimum of two tornado safety drills is required for each school year at schools and facilities described above. These drills shall be conducted for the purpose of preventing fire and related hazards and injuries caused by severe weather. The Director of BFS or the chief of the fire department or a fire fighter in uniform acting under orders and directions of the fire chief, may cause fire drills to be held in school houses, school dormitories, and other public buildings as the BFS considers advisable. The BFS may order the installation of other protective apparatus or equipment as shall conform to recognized and approved modern practices. Violation of this law is a misdemeanor, punishable by up to 90 days in jail and/or maximum of \$100.00 fine.

_____ Facility				
Record of Drills Held – 20__ - 20__				
FIRE DRILLS				
Drill No.	Date	Evacuation Time	Conducted By	Teacher or Principal Signature
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
TORNADO DRILLS				
1				
2				

If you have any questions regarding this bulletin, please contact the BFS, Fire Safety Plan Review Division at (517) 241-8847

Please be advised that as a recipient of the BFS Bulletins, you are free to treat the contents as a news release in your name to the local news media or any other means of circulation.